

Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers October 6, 2005

News You Can Use

Distracted Driving

If it's true that trends start on the coasts and work their way inward in the United States, then we'd better get ready for laws that take the distracted driving issue beyond cell phone use to prohibit all sorts of activities that distract drivers.

Last week, Connecticut approved a penalty for behavior that could distract drivers -- including "glancing at a newspaper, typing on a BlackBerry, applying lipstick while looking in the rearview mirror or turning around to yell at the kids in the backseat," the New York Times reports.

Drivers pulled over for speeding and the like could get an additional \$100 fine for driving while distracted.

The Times says it's the latest example of states cracking down on people who drive while preoccupied with other activities.

Nevada has toughened penalties for drivers who kill someone while eating, putting on makeup or using a cell phone.

Washington banned driving while "reading, writing, performing personal grooming, interacting with pets or unsecured cargo" or playing video games.

Other states are considering similar laws, while there are proposals from Michigan lawmakers to ban cell-phone use while driving.

A 2002 Harvard study estimated that drivers using cell phones may cause about 2,600 deaths a year nationwide and 330,000 injuries, the Times says.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that distractions are a factor in up to 80% of all traffic accidents reported to the police. Source: Matt Helms, Detroit Free Press

Latest Traffic Safety News

Automakers Consider Night Vision

Once used solely by the military, many carmakers are equipping new vehicles with night vision. The systems use heat-sensing technology allowing drivers to see people or animals three to five times farther than normal. Black and white images are projected into the driver's view from small cameras fitted in the bumper or rearview mirror. While night vision could prove beneficial for rural settings to improve animal detection, the system could also be advantageous in urban areas.

Car-Sharing Concept Gaining Momentum

For many drivers across the country, car-sharing is becoming a popular alternative to car-ownership. Under the concept, customers are renting cars or trucks for a few hours rather than a full day. Car-sharing vehicles are stored in lots, often found near subway stations and college campuses. Customers reserve online or by phone and then use wireless-enabled cards to unlock and start vehicles. Rates are as low as \$8.50 an hour, plus annual fees of \$40 to \$50. Key markets are densely populated cities including Boston, New York, and Los Angeles. This practice has drivers in vehicles that they are not familiar with. Read the full article at http://www.usatoday.com/money/autos/2005-09-14-car-sharing_x.htm

NTSB: Transportation-Related Fatalities Decrease In 2004

Transportation fatalities in the United States decreased slightly in 2004, according to the preliminary findings released by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). Deaths from transportation incidents in the United States totaled 44,870 in 2004, a decrease from 45,158 in 2003. Roadway transportation, which accounts for the largest portion of transportation-related fatalities, declined from 42,884 in 2003 to 42,636 in 2004. Read the release at <http://www.nts.gov/Pressrel/2005/050909.htm>

USPS Issues Stamp Promoting Children's Health, Child Passenger Safety

The United States Postal Service is promoting child care issues by issuing a commemorative postage stamp that reminds Americans of the importance of properly using child safety seats, having medical check-ups, a balanced diet, and regular exercise. In the margins of the stamp sheet, there will be text detailing these health issues. The first-class stamp will be available nationwide and will coincide with "The Year of the Healthy child" as deemed by the U.S. Surgeon General. Read the release at http://www.usps.com/communications/news/stamps/2005/sr05_040.htm

Most Minivans Offer Poor Protection Against Neck Injuries In Rear Crashes

Recent evaluations of seat/head restraints in minivans conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) found that many current models are marginal or poor, indicating that they wouldn't provide adequate protection from whiplash injuries for many people in rear-end collisions. The Institute tested seat/head restraint designs available in 14 current minivan models. Researchers first tested head restraint geometry, or the height of a restraint and its horizontal distance behind the back of the head. Seats with acceptable restraint geometry are then tested using a dummy that measures forces on the neck. This test simulates a collision with a stationary vehicle that is struck in the rear at 20 mph. Read the release at <http://www.iihs.org/news/2005/pr091805.html>

Honda To Introduce Motorcycle Airbag

Honda is expected to roll out a motorcycle airbag in the United States next spring. The airbag is designed to protect riders in full-frontal crashes. The airbag will be offered on the 1800cc Honda Gold Wing. The announcement comes as motorcycle deaths rise, up 87 percent from 1997. The newly passed highway legislation mandates a federal study into the causes of motorcycle crashes—the first of its kind in 30 years. States are looking to training and licensing law changes to address the problem. Read the full article at http://money.cnn.com/2005/09/08/Autos/honda_airbag.reut/

Robotic Vehicles May Change Military Operations

Unmanned ground vehicles may change on-the-ground warfare, and may not be that far away from completion. The military and its contractors are currently developing software, sensors, and networking schemes that let vehicles operate autonomously. The Stryker eight-wheeled vehicles will allow soldiers to pay attention to their surroundings rather than their vehicles. In fact, the vehicles could be assigned to a mission and deal with the variables, all while keeping the troops out of harm's way. Read the full article at http://www.washingtontechnology.com/news/20_19/news/27046-1.html

Japanese Automakers Respond To New Car Smell Health Dangers

The often sought after new-car smell might be hazardous to a driver's health, according to reports. Recent research has linked the scent to a toxic combination of harmful chemicals with fumes that can trigger headaches, sore throats, nausea, and drowsiness. Prolonged exposure to some chemicals can even lead to cancer. Now Japanese automakers are becoming the first to set an industry-wide goal of reducing cabin concentrations. Read the full article at <http://www.detnews.com/2005/autosinsider/0509/27/01-327665.htm>

News from USDOT

NHTSA Announces Record Seat Belt Use

U.S Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta announced that a record 82 percent of Americans wear their seat belts while driving or riding in their vehicles. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), between 2004 and 2005, 10 percent of non-users adopted the habit of buckling their seat belts. At this new rate, the Secretary said seat belts are preventing 15,700 fatalities, 350,000 injuries, and \$67 billion in economic costs associated with traffic injuries and deaths every year. Read the release at

http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/site/nhtsa/template.MAXIMIZE/menuitem.f2217bee37fb302f6d7c121046108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=1e51531b2220b0f8ea14201046108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_1e51531b2220b0f8ea14201046108a0c_viewID=detail_view&javax.portlet.begCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token&itemID=e6258f21b62a6010VgnVCM1000002c567798RCRD&overrideViewName=PressRelease

NHTSA: SUV Fatality Rate On The Decline

NHTSA's 2004 final fatality statistics reflected a favorable trend for SUV safety and determined that the possibility of death or injury is on the decline. Earlier this year, the Administration announced that that SUV occupant fatalities increased by almost 6 percent. However, with SUV registrations up 11 percent, the fatality rate actually declined by 4.7 percent. For more information visit <http://www.suvva.com/press/index.cfm?id=99>

Groups Challenge FMCSA Driver Training Ruling

The Owner-Operator Independent Driver's Association (OOIDA) and other public interest groups are challenging the Federal Motor Carrier Association's (FMCSA) driver training rule. The rule took 13 years to write, but it doesn't require entry-level drivers to receive actual training in how to drive a commercial motor vehicle (CMV). OOIDA and others filed suit after the ruling was published in May 2004. Read the full article at http://www.landlinemag.com/todays_news/Daily/2005/Sep05/091405.htm

First-Ever Exemptions Granted To Insulin-Treated Diabetics

Four insulin-treated diabetics recently became the first truck drivers to be granted exemption by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to run on interstates. Before the 2003 waiver, insulin-dependent drivers were not allowed to drive on interstates, making a three-year requirement for waiver nearly impossible to meet. Under the 2003 program, insulin-dependent drivers could only get a waiver from the medical requirement if they had three years of driving experience while controlling diabetes. The change in the exemption comes with the passage of the recent Highway Bill. Read the full article at

http://www.landlinemag.com/Special_Reports/2005/Sep05/091205_diabetes_exemptions.htm

NHTSA Announces New Child Passenger Safety Regulations

NHTSA announced that it will require booster seats for kids up to age 10 and weighing up to 80 pounds. The new federal requirements are in response to legislation signed in 2002 requiring

automakers to provide shoulder and lap seat belts in the middle back seats of vehicles. Proponents say seat belts and air bags offer inadequate protection for a small person involved in a crash. For more information visit

<http://www.aaafoundation.org/multimedia/index.cfm?SMContentIndex=16&SMContentSet=0>

Work-Life:

NTSB Report Issues Teen Driver Education Recommendations

NTSB has released a report summarizing a recent forum that examined the extent to which driver education is used, its effectiveness and shortcomings, and what can be done to improve it. The report includes conclusions and recommendations on driver training that were developed during the forum. According to NTSB, the 56-year-old formula of 30 hours of classroom training followed by 6 hours of behind-the-wheel training was established arbitrarily and may be inadequate to teach teenagers the skills necessary to drive safely on today's roadways. NTSB also recommended that the U.S. Department of Education and NHTSA review current driver education training programs to determine the appropriate instructional tools, training methods, and curricula. View the report at <http://www.nts.gov/publicn/2005/RP0501.pdf>

NHTSA Launches New Campaign To Address Teen Driver Distractions

NHTSA has created a pilot campaign to educate young drivers about the causes and consequences of driver distractions, while empowering them to make safe and informed decisions behind the wheel. The six cities selected for the campaign are: Sacramento, CA; Austin, TX; Gainesville, FL; Richmond, VA; Sioux Falls, SD; and Springfield, MO. The campaign showcases the stories of young drivers who have had significant or frightening experiences with distractions behind the wheel, and the website offers a place for young adults to share their own personal stories. For more information visit <http://www.distracteddriving.org/>

NTSB Urges Cell Phone Ban For Nation's Young Drivers

According to NTSB, banning teen drivers from using cell phones or other wireless devices while driving should be a national auto safety priority. The NTSB put the proposed restriction on its "most wanted" list of safety improvements for the upcoming year. The list also includes previous appeals that call on states to impose limits on teens' night driving and carrying of passengers. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among young people aged 15 to 20 years old. Read the full article at http://money.cnn.com/2005/09/21/technology/personaltech/cellphone_teens.reut/index.htm

ITS Institute Uses Technology To Reduce Dangerous Teen Driving

With support from the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Institute at the University of Minnesota, a mechanical engineering graduate student is developing a black box called the Teen Driver Support System. The system includes onboard data logging, and as an option, can detect alcohol use. It could potentially be integrated with graduated driver licensing procedures for beginning drivers.

New Devices Improve Monitoring Children In Rear Seats

According to a report by the Wall Street Journal, carmakers are creating new devices to improve monitoring of children in rear seats. Devices include forward sliding second row seats and mini-mirrors for rear seat viewing. Sliding seats brings kids closer, but still far enough a way from airbags, while mini-mirrors allow drivers to view children while still using regular rear-view mirrors. So far Ford Motor Co. and Toyota feature the advancements on select vehicle models.

International Traffic Safety News:

Israeli Government Traffic Safety Plan To Focus On Drivers

The Israeli government is planning to install 1,200 digital cameras at intersections in its efforts to focus on drivers instead of vehicles. The Minister of Transport announced the new plans at a recent meeting of the Association of Traffic Safety Officers. The new plan would also establish lots for vehicles confiscated from drivers driving without a license, driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or driving overloaded vehicles. A police officer will have the authority to confiscate a vehicle, and send it to a lot for a month. Read the full article at

<http://www.globes.co.il/serveen/globes/docview.asp?did=1000014817&fid=942>

UK Considers Black Box Technology To Aid Police Crash Investigations

Transportation officials in the UK are proposing the introduction of "black box" technology to help police determine the causes of crashes. Meanwhile, a UK insurance company is drawing on the technology to provide pay-as-you-go insurance based on the data collected. It is the hope that black boxes will help police understand why a crash happened by providing information on how the car was driven in the moments before a collision. Read the full article at

<http://www.aaafoundation.org/multimedia/index.cfm?SMContentIndex=16&SMContentSet=0>

Toronto Officials Divided Over Showing Movie Clips To Drivers

City Councilors in Toronto are divided over permitting a movie complex to erect giant screens to show movie clips alongside a major highway. Some city councilors are concerned that the screens could cause driver distraction and jeopardize highway safety. Officials have said that the distraction could be similar to talking on cell phones while driving, which were also initially thought to be harmless, but are now considered a safety risk. Read the full article at

<http://news.webindia123.com/news/showdetails.asp?id=123752&cat=World>

Report Examines Belt Use Among Australia's Heavy Vehicle Drivers

Australia's National Transport Commission has released a report examining driver comfort—seat and belt configurations—for drivers of heavy vehicles. The report attempts to determine whether these factors relate to belt use compliance and whether any seat belt design issues need to be resolved to improve belt use. View the report at

<http://www.ntc.gov.au/filemedia/Reports/SeatBeltConfigforHVSeptember2005.pdf>

New Brochure Addresses Vehicle, Animal Collisions

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (OMT) has released a brochure designed to help drivers avoid wildlife collisions. According to OMT, one in every 18 motor vehicle crashes in Ontario involves a wild animal. On average, a motor vehicle collides with a wild animal every 38 minutes, and 90 percent of these collisions occur on two-lane roads in rural areas, during the spring and the fall mating season.

For more information visit <http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/pdf/wildlife.pdf>

Scientists Draw On Human Senses To Prevent Crashes

Scientists at England's University of Oxford are studying the power of senses in preventing traffic crashes. According to researchers, a driver's sense of touch and scent could help warn drivers of impending danger and keep them safe on the road. For example, vibrating seats, belts, and foot pedals could alert a drowsy or distracted driver of a potential hazardous situation. The scientists also say that a peppermint odor could improve concentration and citrus may help to keep drowsy drivers alert. Read the full article at

http://money.cnn.com/2005/09/07/Autos/funonwheels/safety_signals/index.htm

Australian Automobile Assoc. To Hold Intelligent Traffic Systems Forum

The Australian Automobile Association (AAA) is holding a special forum on the latest advances in intelligent traffic systems. It will feature electron stability control systems, which the organization considers as important as seat belts in saving lives. Also included in the forum: demonstrations of cars that automatically keep speed limits by reading signs, new devices that warn drivers of safety hazards including school zones and traffic congestion, and lane departure warning systems to alert fatigued and distracted drivers. Read the full article at <http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=64482>

Black Boxes To Create Ultimate Speed Trap For UK Drivers

The UK's Department of Transport has commissioned companies to develop aircraft-style black boxes for cars, which will be used to automatically issue a ticket every time the vehicle exceeds the speed limit. The black boxes will be configured to the government's central computer via global positioning systems. Every time a vehicle surpasses the speed limit the black boxes will send a signal to the computer with the car registration number and a ticket will be issued. The boxes will also be able to slow vehicles down by overriding the engine management system. In the case of stolen vehicles, the boxes will be able to bring vehicles to a complete halt. Read the full article at <http://www.aaafoundation.org/multimedia/index.cfm?SMContentIndex=16&SMContentSet=0>